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Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

Convention (n° 182) sur les pires formes de travail des enfants, 1999

Convenio sobre las peores formas de trabajo infantil, 1999 (núm. 182)

Written information provided by the Government

The Government has provided the following information.

The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict

The Committee of Experts noted "... from the Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict that an action plan was signed between the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and a standing order was issued by the CJTF in this regard. However, it noted that although there was a decline in the total number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children for armed conflict, the Report of the Secretary-General indicated that grave violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram against children remained gravely disturbing, in particular the use of children as carriers of person-borne improvised explosive devices as well as the large number of abductions".

The Federal Government of Nigeria's response in the Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict has indicated that the Government report covers the period from January 2020 to December 2021. The report focuses on the three conflict-affected states in north-east Nigeria, namely, Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. It highlights grave violations against children committed by the terrorist groups – Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, notably Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad and Islamic State West Africa province.

The Government had previously reiterated its position on this same concern that terrorism is a global issue of concern and is worrisome to the world population especially those living within and in the midst of the terrorists' war zones. It has not been easy for Nigerians and others in similar or even worse situations. Parents losing a child to terrorist marauders is a horrendous experience and bane to society and the Government has deployed the military on recovery missions and to protect communities from further kidnapping sprees by terrorists.

The Government, through the Ministry of Defence, is carrying out regular sensitization workshops and ensuring the registration of members of vigilante groups who are also closely monitored by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. Also, child victims who have been released and/or rescued from the enclaves of Boko Haram are adequately rehabilitated through the Operation Safe Corridor carried out by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development and the Ministry of Defence. Moreover, the

Child Rights Bill has been signed into law by some of the central states of the Federation with protracted armed conflicts such as Borno State in Nigeria.

On monitoring mechanisms and penalties

Efforts at monitoring mechanisms and penalties are inter-ministerial. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015 prohibits the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict. It also addresses the penalties for violation of the Act and the punishment for perpetrators. The victims, inclusive of children, are adequately rehabilitated and integrated into society with the assistance of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. To this effect, a Bill to amend the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, No. 4, 2015, provides stiffer penalties for cases of trafficking in persons and criminalizes orphan trafficking. More efforts include the inauguration of State Task Forces against Human Trafficking in the 23 states of the Federation of Nigeria; the inauguration of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Violence Against Persons (A-TIVAP) Vanguard in 82 Federal Unity Colleges, 2 Nigeria Air-force Schools, and 1 Command Day Secondary School; and the establishment of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) offices in 28 states of the Federation of Nigeria. In addition, the Government reiterates its previous statements on monitoring and penalty mechanisms. The Government notes the Committee of Experts' request in this respect and it will continue to provide information on identified cases of trafficking in children under 18 years, the prosecutions brought, the convictions obtained and the penalties imposed.

Preventing the engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour, access to free basic education and the special situation of girls

The Government restates its previous position on the various measures put in place to improve access to education which include the National Policy on Inclusive Education, the Safe School Initiative launched in the North West for students affected by the conflict, the Students Tutoring, Mentoring, and Counselling Programme, and the School Enrolment Campaign. The Government notes the June 2022 press release by UNICEF as mentioned by the Committee of Experts with the intention to make inquiries in consultations with the Katsina State Government on the press statement and the figures attributed to it. Nationally, there is no gender discrimination as regards access to education in Nigeria. Boys and girls are given equal opportunity to attend school and gain knowledge. The Government is taking deliberate measures to curb any irregularities in this regard to increase school enrolment and attendance rates at primary and secondary school levels and to lower drop-out rates.

The *almajiri* (children in Islamic schools who are also sent out to beg: according to the Office report) phenomenon is being curbed by the establishment of the Almajiri Special Education Project with the aim of integrating basic education into the Koranic schools to form a holistic curriculum for that segment of society and diminish the risk of worst forms of child labour. The Almajiri schools are present and making inroads into the educational emancipation of the most affected and vulnerable children and youths.

Legally, national laws in the spirit of the Articles and provisions of the Convention are very robust and comprehensive to protect children from the worst forms of child labour. They include but are not limited to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as the ground norm, labour laws, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2015, as amended, and the Immigration Act, etc. These laws cover the minimum age at work, the minimum age for hazardous work, the prohibition of forced labour, the prohibition

of child trafficking, the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children, the prohibition of the involvement of children in illicit activities, and the minimum age for voluntary military recruitment.

Child labour agencies and committees in Nigeria include the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the Ministry of Women Affairs, the NAPTIP, the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Immigration Services, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Population Commission, employers' and workers' organizations, faith-based organizations, and civil society organizations/non-governmental organizations.

Finally, the Government notes all the observations and requests by the Committee of Experts on the issues of concern. It also acknowledges that the issue of the elimination of child labour, especially the worst forms of child labour, is a prerequisite for sustainable development and economic growth. Consequently, it considers that the efforts and zeal by the Government to date, will ultimately ensure the eradication of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking, and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the year 2025 as a matter of priority. The Federal Government of Nigeria reaffirms its commitment to the ideals of the Convention as ratified.

Discussion by the Committee

Chairperson – Dear colleagues we will now start our second case in our agenda, which is the individual case of Nigeria on the application of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Before I invite the Government representative of Nigeria, I would like to inform the Committee once again we have 19 speakers on the list and as I announced in the morning the automatic reduction of time applies.

Government representative – We thank you for this opportunity to provide full information to the Conference on the application of the provisions of Convention No. 182. It is acknowledged that this Convention can be considered as the most important among all the core Conventions as it deals with children who are the future of a society. It can also be considered as a reflection of the soul of a nation as the state of its humanities portrayed by how much the children are protected and given a good beginning for a hopeful future. In the course of our appearance before this Committee we have taken to heart the guidance given on the Conventions pertaining to the effective abolition of child labour.

Currently the Federal Executive Council has approved the Labour Standards Bill which provides for the protection of children at work from admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature and the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the physical and mental development of young persons, in line with the provisions of the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). We are therefore open for guidance on the application of the Conventions duly ratified by Nigeria.

This Bill with other bills covering labour administration have been forwarded to the Ministry of Justice for legal drafting, preparatory for legislation by the National Assembly. Among others, the Bill provides for minimum age of employment to be 15 years, the list of hazardous child labour previously submitted to this Committee during the Conference in June 2016 and sanctions for contraventions.

The Federal Executive Council also approved the national policy on child labour, the National action plan for the elimination of child labour in Nigeria and a comprehensive list of hazardous child labour. We would wish to further inform this Committee that Nigeria became an alliance 8.7 pathfinder country with commitments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal as SDG 8.7 by taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour and end modern slavery and human trafficking and as pertaining to children, to eliminate the worst forms of child labour including the recruitment and use of child soldiers as well as to end all forms of child labour by the year 2025. To ensure compliance the Ministry has made provisions in the Labour Standards Act to extend labour inspections to the informal economy.

A specific checklist and labour inspection tools for child labour inspections at workplaces have been put in place to ensure the elimination of child labour in the Nation. Also, a child labour website and the reporting App have been developed and the process has been finalized for use in responding to child labour cases and to facilitate compliance at workplaces.

Within the framework of the National Action Plan 2021–25, the Government is strengthening machineries at the three tiers of Government. We have the federal state and local government for the elimination of child labour in the global supply chains in collaboration with the Regional Office of the ILO. These efforts include the national steering committee at the federal level, the state steering committee at the subnational level and the community child labour monitoring committee on the elimination of child labour at the local government level through capacity building on the implementation of the National Action Plan and the state's action plan.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has developed and validated the national social behaviour communication change strategy, that is NSBCC for the elimination of child labour in Nigeria 2021–23. The Ministry also ensures that the elimination of child labour strategy is mainstreamed into the five-year strategic plan of the National Orientations Agency in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the Government through the Ministry and in collaboration with the national bureau of statistics and the ILO, as well as the ACCEL Africa projects, conducted the national child labour and force labour survey for the elimination of child labour and its worst forms in the nation. The result of the survey has been analysed and validated and the subsequent full report has been concluded and is being finalized for launch during the commemoration of the world day against child labour in 2023.

In all, Nigeria is fully committed in its quest to ensure the elimination of child labour, including its worst forms in workplaces within its boundaries. A child's life is like a piece of paper which every person leaves a mark. There is therefore a popular and widely known African proverb that states: "it takes a village to raise a child and the child who is not embraced by the village will one day burn it down to feels its warmth".

We love our children and would not send them to war or affiliate them to terrorist groups to carry arms. We therefore reiterate our defence in 2016 on the same subject by stating that terrorism is a global issue of concern and is worrisome to the world population especially those living within and in the midst of the terrorists' war zones.

It has not been easy for Nigerians and others in similar or even worse situations. Parents losing a child to terrorist marauders is a horrendous experience and a bane to society and the Government has deployed the military or recovery missions to protect communities from further kidnapping sprees by terrorists. The Children and Armed Conflict in Nigeria Report of the Secretary-General covers the period from January 2020 to December 2021. The report focusses on the three conflict effective states in North-Eastern Nigeria namely: Adamawa,

Borno and Yobe. It highlights grave violations against children committed by the terrorist groups, that is Boko Haram -affiliated and splinter groups notably: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati Wal-Jihad and the Islamic State of West Africa Province. In the report, the Secretary-General notes the decrease in verified grave violations against children compared with previous years and that the highly volatile and rapidly evolving security situation in North-Eastern Nigeria continues to have a negative impact on the protection of conflict-affected children.

In the report, the Secretary-General highlights the efforts made by the Government of Nigeria and by a civilian joint taskforce to strengthen the framework to respond to and prevent grave violations against children. In this regard, Nigeria notes and appreciates the recommendations in the report for ending and preventing grave violations and improving the protection of children. We further reiterate that the Government through the Ministry of Defence is carrying out regular sensitization workshops and ensuring the registration of members of the Vigilante Groups who are also closely monitored by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence core.

Child victims who have been released and/or rescued from the enclaves of Boko Haram are adequately rehabilitated to the operation safe corridor by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development and the Ministry of Defence. Also, the Child Rights Bill has been signed into law by some of the epicentral states of the federation with protracted conflict such as Borno state in Nigeria. The Government notes the observations made by the Committee of Experts to continue to take measures using all available means to ensure the full and immediate demobilization of all children to put to a stop the use of children under 18 years in armed fought conflicts; to put in place effective and dissuasive penalties for perpetrators; and to take effective and timebound measures to provide for the rehabilitation and social integration of rescued and released children.

Efforts at monitoring mechanisms are inter-ministerial. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act No. 4 of 2015 prohibits the forced compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict. It also addresses the penalties for violation of liable punishment for perpetrators. The victims inclusive of children are adequately rehabilitated and integrated into society through the assistance of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. To this effect, a bill for an act to amend the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act of 2015 provides stiffer penalties for cases of trafficking in persons and criminalizes orphanage trafficking.

More efforts include the establishment of state forces against human trafficking in the 23 states of the Federation of Nigeria, the establishment of anti-trafficking in persons and violence against persons in federal schools and air forces schools, and the establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), with NAPTIP offices in 20 states of the federation. In addition, we reiterate our previous statements on monitoring and penalty mechanisms. We note the Committee of Experts' request in this respect and the Government will continue to provide information on identified cases of trafficking in children under 18 years, the prosecutions brought, the convictions obtained and the penalties imposed.

On preventing the engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour and access to free basic education, we reiterate our previous position that things have been put in place to improve access to education, which include the national policy on inclusive education, self-school initiative launched in the North West and a robust school campaign. We note the 20 June 2022 press release by UNICEF, mentioned by the Committee of Experts, with the intention to

make inquiries in consultation with the Katsina State Government on the press statement and the figures attributed to it. Nationally there is no gender discrimination in terms of access to education in Nigeria. Both boys and girls are given equal opportunity to attend school and gain knowledge. We will take further necessary measures to curb any irregularities in this regard and to increase school enrolment rates and decrease dropout rates. The *almajiri* phenomenon is being curbed by the establishment of the *Almajiri* Special Education Project with the aim of integrating basic education into the Koranic schools to form a holistic curriculum for that segment of society and diminish the risk of the worst forms of child labour. Legally, national laws in the spirit of the articles and provisions of the Convention are very robust to protect children from the worst forms of child labour. We have the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as the ground norm. We have labour laws, the NAPTIP Act and the Immigration Act. These laws cover minimum age at work, minimum age for hazardous work, prohibition of forced, prohibition of child trafficking, prohibition of commercial sex exploitation of children, prohibition of the involvement of children in illicit activities and minimum age for voluntary military recruitment. We have a lot of child labour agencies who are doing this work and we have a steering committee. We have the development of a national reporting template on the national action plan and we have of course collaboration with various agencies including the United States Department of Labour and of course we commemorate the world day against child labour yearly. Nigeria is a pathfinder country and this has demonstrated the determination of the Government towards the goal of target 8.7 in Nigeria.

We note all the observations and requests by the Committee and we acknowledge that the issue of the elimination of child labour, especially its worst forms is a prerequisite for sustainable development and economic growth. Considering the efforts and zeal by the Government to date, we wish the Committee to note and consider that the Government is committed to continue in its quest to eliminate all forms of child labour by doing its utmost best to deploy military, para-military personnel to curb the terrorists' insurgency and minimize casualties. Programmes and policies will continue to be utilized to curb the menace of child labour and a reorientation to inculcate the benefits of education in the minds of people in the identified areas will continue.

Worker members – We are discussing Nigeria's application of Convention No. 182 ratified by Nigeria in 2002. The Report of the Committee of Experts raises a number of pertinent issues affecting the protection of children with respect to the Government's obligations under the Convention. First, the Committee of Experts raised the issue of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The Committee of Experts makes reference to the Report of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict and the Action Plan that was signed between the Civilian Joint Task Force and the United Nations to end and prevent recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The Secretary-General's Report indicates the grave and deeply disturbing violence and abuse against children in the conflict areas and perpetrated in particular by Boko Haram. The Report raises very grave violations, including child abductions and the use of children as carriers of person-borne improvised explosive devices. The situation of conflict and insecurity instigated by Boko Haram in other terrorist and vigilante groups, is responsible for exposing children to the menace. The Government has an obligation to prioritise the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

Regarding the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict in particular, the Government is under an obligation to take effective and time-bound measures to provide the necessary and appropriate direct assistance for the removal of children from the worst forms of child labour and for the rehabilitation and social integration. In order to fulfil their obligation, the Government of Nigeria has indicated the measures it is taking in this direction.

According to the Committee of Experts' report, the Government through the Ministry of Defence, is carrying out regular sensitization workshops and ensuring the registration of members of vigilante groups, that are closely monitored by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. Also, child victims who have been released from the enclaves of Boko Haram, are adequately rehabilitated through the Operations Safe Corridor, carried out by the Ministry of Humanitarian, Disaster Management and Social Development and the Ministry of Defence. The Governor of the State of Borno, the ground zero of the protracted armed conflict, which has been going on for more than 12 years, has signed the Child Rights Bill into law. The Bill provides for the protection of children against recruitment and use for armed conflict and other forms of violence and exploitation. One cannot doubt that the Government of Nigeria is taking action to address this major challenge, brought on by the conflict. The Government must do more by treating this phenomenon as a matter of priority. We ask the Government of Nigeria to do its utmost best in addressing its obligation under the Convention. As reported by the Committee of Experts, the Report of the Secretary-General indicates that the United Nations has verified 444 grave violations against 356 children in North-Eastern Nigeria. A total of 63 children, of which nine are boys and 54 are girls. Some as young as six years of age, were recruited and used by Boko Haram affiliated and splinter groups, including Islamic State West Africa province in Borno state. It is harrowing, the thought of these children being abducted and used in the conflict. These children also suffer murders and sexual violence. We join the Committee of Experts to strongly urge the Government to continue to take measures using all available means to ensure the full and immediate demobilization of all children to put a stop in practise, to the forced recruitment and use of children into armed groups. The Government must take immediate and effective measures to ensure that thorough investigations and prosecutions of all persons who forcibly recruit children for use in armed conflict, are undertaken and are sufficiently effective and dissuasive penalties are imposed in practice. The rehabilitation and social integration of affected children must be of the highest priority. The Government must take effective and time-bound measures in this regard. The Government must spare no effort in seeking international cooperation and assistance, including the technical assistance of the ILO, to implement its obligation under this Convention. We also urge the Government to be guided by ILO Recommendation No. 205 on employment and work for peace and resilience.

Regarding effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms in line with Articles 5 and 7, we take note of the Government's information that the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking of Persons is undertaking systematic efforts to fight trafficking in persons, including through conducting, awareness-raising and capacity-building programmes, for the judiciary and law enforcement bodies on investigation, and appropriate punishment for the offences under the Act on Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement, 2015. The Worker members welcome the information that the investigations of child trafficking cases have led to the rescue of 2,966 child victims of trafficking. However, we must highlight concerns that Nigeria remains a source, a transit and destination country, for victims of trafficking. With internal trafficking of girls for the purpose of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, and boys for the purpose of child begging, remaining rampant. It is alarming the information that 18 per cent of trafficking victims in Nigeria are girls under the age of 18, and that thousands of children from poor homes, most aged between 15 and 17 are involved in domestic labour. The Government must double its effort to combat child trafficking. In line with the Expert's observations, we urge the Government to continue to provide statistical information on identified cases of trafficking in children under 18 years: the prosecutions brought; the convictions obtained; and the penalties imposed. Children caught up in this situation, are unable to access their right to education and to a safe and peaceful environment, to grow and

develop and to realize their full aspiration and potential and in many cases, without the capacity to access opportunities for social progression. The Government must do all in its power to prevent the engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour, by expanding access to free basic education and paying particular attention to a girl child education in that regard.

We note the initiatives to improve enrolment of children in schools as a preventative measure. However, Chair, we must emphasize as indicated in the report of Experts, that there are still major challenges with net attendance, which was still low at about 70 per cent. Nigeria still has 10.5 million out-of-school children, with 60 per cent of them in northern Nigeria, whereas we have already said, children's right and access to free basic education was seriously being hampered as the conflict has deprived many children of access to education. It is, therefore, no wonder the increase in the number of children in the street begging, including children in Islamic schools who are also sent out to beg. This vicious cycle of poverty, leading to a higher risk of being engaged in the worse forms of child labour, including being recruited into conflict situations and therefore, much more likely to affect one's life chances, become real. The Government must take effective and time-bound measures to prevent the phenomenon of "streetism" among children and to provide for the rehabilitation and reintegration.

Employer members – The Employer members stress the importance of States' compliance with Convention No. 182, the first universally ratified Convention of the ILO on the worst forms of child labour, which is one of the ten ILO fundamental Conventions, and described by the Government representative as the most fundamental of the core Conventions. Nigeria ratified this Convention in 2002 and we note that to date, the Committee of Experts has provided three observations on this case being in 2015, 2018 and most recently in 2022. Today is the first time that this Committee is examining the application of Convention No. 182, by the Government of Nigeria. We take note that the Committee of Experts has identified this as a double-footnoted case for this year. A bit of context about the case. Since 2011, the security landscape in Nigeria has been shaped by the conflict between the State and Boko Haram as well as other armed groups. The conflict has been accompanied by certain cases of banditry and kidnappings in the North East and parts of the South-West of the country. For instance, it is reported that it in March 2021, around 618 schools were closed in six northern states, over fear of attacks and abductions of pupils and staff. We also note that politically, Nigeria has just recently held its general elections in March 2023 and elected a new president and new government at all levels. The Employer members note that technical assistance has also been provided by the ILO to the Government on both labour law reforms and reporting obligations. Following a request by Nigeria in March 2018, the ILO Abuja office, provided a technical note on five bills relating to labour issues, followed in December 2021, by a workshop held to validate the Labour Standards Bill. The ILO has also supported and is still supporting the Government to meet its reporting obligations for the years 2022 and 2023.

The issues that have formed the basis of the observations. The Committee of Experts outlined serious elements of inadequacy on the implementation of the Convention No. 182 by Nigeria. These shortcomings which had been identified in previous observations of the Committee may be categorized into four main issues. These are: compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict and providing the necessary and appropriate direct assistance for the removal of children from the worst forms of child labour and for their rehabilitation and social integration, in line with Articles 3(a) and 7(2)(b); monitoring mechanisms and penalties according to Articles 5 and 7(1); preventing the engagement of children in the worse forms of child labour, access to free basic education and the special

situation of girls, according to Article 7(2)(a) and (e); and identifying and reaching out to children at special risk, according to clause (d).

Now the issues in turn. Issue 1. By reflecting universal consensus and a strong tripartite commitment, Convention No. 182, reminds us of the absolute importance of standing against the scourge of the worst forms of child labour. For the Employers, it is therefore crucial that all Member States fully comply with their obligations outlined in that Convention. The Employer members wish to recall that according to the Government's report, Nigeria has put in place measures to carry out regular sensitization workshops and ensure the registration of members of vigilante groups. The Government also mentioned that adequate rehabilitation is being provided to child victims who have been released or rescued. Despite progress at the legislative and policy level, a 2022 UN Report on Children in Armed Conflict still records high numbers of children recruited by armed groups. We further take note of the Committee of Experts' observation deploring the persistence of the practice which also entails other violations of the rights of children, such as abductions, murders and sexual violence. Like the Committee of Experts, the Employer members acknowledge the complexity of the situation on the ground with armed groups still present in the country. However, we equally share the Committee of Experts' concerns and echo their recommendations to the Government, notably, one to ensure the full and immediate demobilization of all children and put a stop in practice to their forced recruitment into armed groups; to ensure a thorough investigation, prosecution and penalization of all perpetrators of forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; and to ensure the rehabilitation and social integration of child victims of forced recruitment

Second issue. Regarding monitoring mechanisms and penalties, the Employer members note that the Government has implemented measures to fight trafficking in persons, through its national agency. Including providing capacity building on investigating cases of trafficking. However, we also note that according to a 2018 Statement of the UN special rapporteur, for trafficking in persons, Nigeria remains a source, transit and destination country for victims of trafficking and that internal trafficking of girls for purposes of domestic servitude and domestic exploitation and of boys for purposes of child begging, is still rife. We further note that UNICEF and IOM report that 18 per cent of trafficking victims in Nigeria are girls under the age of 18. Thousands of children from poor homes are involved in domestic labour. Also, on this issue, the Employers align with the Committee of Experts' position in asking the Government to strengthen its efforts to combat child trafficking by ensuring that the perpetrators of these acts are identified, prosecuted and that sufficiently effective and dissuasive sanctions are imposed.

Third issue. Regarding the prevention of engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour and their access to free basic education, the Employers note that in a 2018 UNICEF report, highlighting that Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children, amounting to 10.5 million of whom 60 per cent are girls. The Government did not provide any information to the Experts on their observations on this issue. Nevertheless, we take note of the launch in June 22 by a Nigerian state government in partnership with UNICEF, of a cash transfer programme to provide learning opportunities for over 20,000 out of school children in that state. Taking note of the Experts' deep concern at the significant number of children who are deprived of basic education, we support the Committee of Experts' request to intensify the Government's efforts to improve the functioning of the education system and to facilitate access for all children to free basic education. In particular, for girls and children in the war in the areas of North-Eastern Nigeria.

The fourth issue. As to identifying and reaching out to children at special risk, we take note of the Committee of Experts' concerns regarding the fact that 62 per cent of the

10.1 million out of school children in Nigerian are boys, of whom the majority especially in the north, are made up of children who are *almajiri* children, who are denied the right to education. Noting that also on this issue, the Government has not provided information, we align with the Committee of Experts in asking the Government to take effective and time-bound measures to protect all street children, including *almajiris* from the worst forms of child labour and to provide for their rehabilitation and reintegration. We further ask the Government to provide information on measures taken and the number of children integrated.

Finally, in acknowledging the persistence of serious violations of Convention No. 182 and gaps in reporting, we call on the Government to continue to prioritize the rights of children, including in the commitments made and reaffirmed at the Global Conference on Child Labour held in Durban in 2022. We also call on the Government to continue to avail itself of ILO technical assistance.

Worker member, Nigeria – I speak for Nigeria's organized labour community, and we say that we fully align with the submissions of the Committee of Experts concerning this case. As you have read, the Committee of Experts noted the pragmatic interventions that the Government have initiated to stem the challenges undermining the development of the Nigerian child. Unfortunately, the Committee of Experts have observed that these measures come far short for sundry reasons, some of which we shall touch on in ways that can provide more pieces of information to this Committee that can help it reach a conclusion that would assist our country to continue to improve in terms of areas of focus, direction, processes, content and likely outcomes.

Insecurity remains a severe challenge militating against the preservation of the environment for the development of children in schools and playgrounds. In North-Eastern Nigeria, the activities of criminal and violent groups have persisted. As the Committee of Experts have rightly noted, these groups have continued to utilize and exploit children as fighters, cannon fodder and kidnapped victims to extract ransoms to finance their violent operations. Our country would need support to degrade, displace and defeat these elements. Further, it would be desirable for the Nigerian State to be able to effectively extract children involved in violent activities and victims of security-challenged environments. The Government must also be able to effectively rehabilitate and reintegrate these children into a stable, safe and healthy environment. Given the traumatic and mental-joggling experience these children are subjected and exposed to, it is pertinent that psychological and mental health counselling and assistance should be provided in doses and frequency necessary to heal and help them reintegrate into their communities.

As organized labour and parents, we genuinely worry about where children continue to be enslaved, utilized in forced and bonded labour and trafficked within, through and outside of our country. We are distraught with the legal and administrative systems that allow perpetrators, handlers and sponsors to get away with very light sanctions. This Committee must encourage, support and work with the Government with the inclusion of social partners to review and revamp existing pieces of legislation. As a show of our commitment to being part of the solution to this endemic crisis, the Nigeria Labour Congress pledges to be a member of the Alliance 8.7 to be more active in the fight against all forms of child labour in Nigeria.

The state of labour inspection in Nigeria has remained lax and almost non-existent, which is also partly responsible for the cases of the growing incidence of child labour and the exploitation of children. In the past, this Committee has made the point about the need to improve the labour inspection regime in Nigeria, through a well-defined plan to improve

systems, personnel, materials and schedules in a scalable manner. We ask that this request be reiterated with urgency and the addition of the provision of a roadmap for implementation.

In all sincerity, poverty and socio-economic dispossession are at the heart of the dominant and spiking state of the incidence of child labour in Nigeria. These issues exacerbate in ways that the worst forms of child labour are increasingly becoming normalised. The 2020 Multidimensional Poverty Index survey reveals that 133 million people live in different poverty stages, representing a staggering 63 per cent of Nigeria's population.

It is also disturbing that out of Nigeria's 216 million population, 20 million children are disadvantaged due to a lack of access to education. UNESCO has confirmed that the country now has 20 million children out of school. We are worried that Governments at all levels have made lightweight commitments to investment in education. World Bank figures show that Nigeria's public investment in education fell from 7.5 per cent in 2019 to 5.1 per cent in 2022. Several State Governments are sacking teachers, and most are withholding and delaying the payment of salaries, and wage freeze imposed for several years. As organized labour, we have continued to advocate for the defeat of Illicit Financial Flow activities of tax avoidance, evasion and dodging as part of the interventions to improve internal and alternative resource mobilization possibilities, which will increase the Governments' chances of financing public services such as education and public health provisions.

Poverty is forcing many children to be absent, skip classes, and drop out after successful enrolment. The situation is worse for the girl child, who often is recruited by the family as an additional hand in the family business rather than be sent to school. This kind of choice entrenches and sustains feminization and generational poverty.

In the past eight years and counting, we have continued to witness the worsening of families' economic situation on account of successive Governments' voodoo fiscal and macroeconomic policies. Household poverty mirrors child labour in Nigeria. We urge this Committee to assist the Government in formulating and implementing socio-economic policies that will effectively target and address child poverty and child labour. The development and deployment of an expanded and enriched social protection provision programme can help.

Government member, Sweden – I have the honour to speak on behalf of the **European Union and its Member States**. The Candidate Countries **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro**, the EFTA countries **Iceland and Norway**, Members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The EU and its Member States are committed to the promotion, protection, respect and fulfilment of human rights, including labour rights and the fight against child labour, with a priority to its worst forms. We will continue to stand up for the rights of every child to reach their full potential within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, in line with the Council conclusions on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

We underline that the universal ratification of Convention No. 182 must be accompanied by effective implementation in law and practice. As stated in the Durban call to action, the worst forms of child labour should be eliminated as a matter of urgency - a commitment also included in the 2030 Agenda.

The EU and its Member States are long-term partners of Nigeria. This partnership is further reinforced by the Multiannual Indicative Programme for Nigeria 2021–27 which highlights the EU's zero-tolerance approach for child labour and includes measures and

objectives supporting youth employment, human development, education with a special focus on young women and girls, job creation, and addressing trafficking in human beings.

While noting certain measures taken by the Government of Nigeria, we express our deep concern about the continued recruitment and use of children by armed groups, which is a grave violation of child rights and international humanitarian law and perpetuates other serious crimes such as abductions, murders and sexual and gender-based violence. We urge the Government to ensure the full and immediate demobilization of all children and to put an immediate end to the practice of forced and other recruitment of children by armed groups in the country. The Government must ensure that adequate and timely support is provided to those children, who as victims should have access to rehabilitation, psychological and social integration supports, noting also growing issues of stigmatisation and exclusion. We call for investigations and prosecutions for recruiting children in armed conflict and for full accountability to be ensured. Effective and dissuasive penalties should also be imposed on perpetrators. We urge the Government to take all the necessary measures to prevent the re-involvement of children in this vicious practice, including by targeted labour policies aimed at tackling poverty and creating decent work opportunities for their families and communities. We welcome the constructive engagement of local stakeholders, which has resulted in the development of a UN Offer to support the Federal and State Government in the Implementation of the Borno Model in the North East of Nigeria. This Offer prioritizes the development of guidelines for transitional justice and community-based reconciliation processes, including the safeguarding and protection of children and women, in coordination with the Federal Government.

Particularly worrying are also the continuing practices of human trafficking and the large number of children who are victims of both cross-border and internal trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation, particularly affecting girls under the age of 18. In line with the Committee's request, we urge the Government of Nigeria to intensify its efforts to combat child trafficking and to ensure that the perpetrators are investigated and prosecuted, and that effective and dissuasive penalties are imposed.

Given the gravity and magnitude of the situation, we stress also the importance of development cooperation and engaging all relevant stakeholders. We encourage the Government to avail itself of further technical cooperation, including by expanding existing ILO technical assistance in the country. We look forward to continuing joint efforts with the Government of Nigeria and the ILO and its constituents.

Government member, Canada – Canada would like to thank the Government of Nigeria for the updated information provided to the Committee of Experts and to this Committee on its effort to combat the worst forms of child labour. Canada is deeply concerned which reports of the worst form of child labour including use of children in armed conflict by non-state armed group such as Boko Haram and reports of abduction, murders and sexual violence.

Canada is further concerned by the Committee of Expert's report regarding the cross border and internal trafficking of girls for the purpose of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, and of boys for the purpose of child begging. All children have the right to reach a full potential through safe and equitable access to education. This is a critical element in eradicating child labour.

Canada firmly believes that an armed conflict is no place for children and condemns all grave violations of children's rights in the strongest terms. This is why Canada established the Group of Friends of children in armed conflicts in Nigeria in November 2022, which we continue to culture alongside Norway. Canada recognizes that the Government of Nigeria has taken

steps to protect the rights of children. We welcome the demonstrated commitment by the Government of Nigeria in this respect. The implementation of these legislative milestones will be key to protecting children from the worst forms of child labour and rehabilitating affected youths.

Canada fully supports the recommendations of the Committee of Experts and recommends that: Nigeria ensure that all States adopt the 2003 Child Rights Act and protect children including from harmful traditional practices; intensify measures to investigate, arrest and prosecute cases related to the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking in children; and to impose dissuasive and sufficiently effective sanctions, ensure free basic education to all children at the elementary and secondary levels; and to take all necessary measures to protect, rehabilitate and reintegrate all children at special risk, particularly children removed from the worst forms of child labour and armed conflict as well as free children; and finally continue providing information to the Committee of Experts, including statistics on the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions of child trafficking, as well as the number of children removed and rehabilitated from situations of forced labour.

We encourage Nigeria to continue to take action to protect the rights of children and look forward to the Government's next report to the Committee of Experts.

Membre travailleuse, France – Être un enfant au Nigéria, et a fortiori un enfant fille, est un facteur de risque énorme: risque de rester analphabète, risque d'être victime de violence et surtout de traite. Le terme «fille-enfant» a été conceptualisé par nombre d'ONG et instituts de recherche sociologiques. Il fait référence à une enfant de sexe féminin, âgée de 6 à 18 ans. Ainsi, dans les régions touchées par les conflits, au nord-est du Nigéria, les filles-enfants sont plus de deux fois susceptibles d'être non scolarisées que les filles vivant dans les régions épargnées.

Le président nigérian, en janvier 2020, disait que le Nigéria compte 13 millions d'enfants non scolarisés. Les petites filles représentent 60 pour cent de ce chiffre. Les idéologies de genre omniprésentes au niveau des ménages et des communautés favorisent toujours les garçons par rapport aux filles et favorisent des opportunités et des résultats éducatifs différentiels. Cette conception culturelle est un obstacle à l'éducation de nombreuses fillettes et augmente le risque pour les fillettes d'être victimes de violence, de traite et d'exploitation sexuelle.

La commission confirme cette analyse en notant qu'environ 60 pour cent des enfants non scolarisés sont des filles et que beaucoup de celles qui s'inscrivent à l'école abandonnent ensuite. La pauvreté est le premier facteur qui affecte l'éducation des petites filles. La violence en est un autre. En effet, si certains parents arrivent à surmonter la préférence pour leur enfant masculin et acceptent de scolariser leur fille, il n'en demeure pas moins que la localisation de l'école, la distance à parcourir et l'environnement peuvent rester des freins puissants, de même que la permanence du harcèlement sexuel dans le cadre éducatif par les enseignants ou les élèves masculins.

De même, il est souligné dans de nombreux rapports que les effectifs pléthoriques, l'absence de toilettes accessibles aux jeunes filles, le comportement des garçons et des enseignants masculins rendent difficile, parfois impossible, la fréquentation de l'école pour ces jeunes filles. Il est donc bien question de volonté politique avant toute chose. S'ajoute à ces freins l'exclusion sociale liée à des pratiques culturelles et religieuses, telles que le mariage précoce, qui privent les jeunes filles d'éducation.

Le Nigéria reste un pays de transit et de destination pour la traite et la traite interne des filles à des fins d'exploitation sexuelle et domestique. L'OIM s'alarme depuis plusieurs années au sujet des résultats genrés de la traite. Les filles de moins de 18 ans sont particulièrement touchées par ce phénomène.

Tout en prenant note de certaines mesures prises par le gouvernement, la commission se doit d'exprimer sa profonde préoccupation devant le nombre important d'enfants, et de filles surtout, qui ne suivent pas l'enseignement de base, car l'on ne peut nier l'importance de l'éducation des filles dans la qualité de développement d'un pays, selon le dicton qui dit: «Si vous éduquez une fille, vous éduquez une famille et la nation tout entière.»

Membre gouvernemental, Suisse – La Suisse est profondément préoccupée par les situations conflictuelles qui perdurent dans le nord du Nigéria et par les conséquences dévastatrices qu'elles font subir à l'ensemble de la population. La Suisse appelle toutes les parties aux conflits à respecter les dispositions du droit international et à tout mettre en œuvre pour trouver une issue pacifique au conflit.

La situation des enfants est particulièrement alarmante. Plusieurs groupes armés recrutent des enfants de force, parfois en procédant à des enlèvements, afin de les utiliser dans le cadre des conflits armés, entre autres comme porteurs d'engins explosifs. Cette pratique est contraire aux Protocoles additionnels aux Conventions de Genève et à la convention (n° 182) sur les pires formes de travail des enfants, 1999, de l'OIT. Par conséquent, la Suisse appelle les parties aux conflits à assurer la démobilisation des enfants engagés dans des forces armées et à mettre un terme à leur recrutement à des fins militaires. La Suisse prie également le gouvernement nigérian de prendre les mesures nécessaires pour faciliter la réinsertion sociale des anciens enfants soldats. Le gouvernement nigérian doit également mener des poursuites pénales à l'encontre des individus ayant recruté des enfants à des fins militaires.

Les conflits armés affectent également directement l'accès à l'éducation. Selon les estimations de l'OIT, environ 10 millions d'enfants ne sont pas scolarisés au Nigéria. Ces enfants sont plus susceptibles de vivre dans des conditions précaires et d'être victimes de diverses formes d'abus et d'exploitation, y compris du travail forcé. À cet égard, la traite d'enfants à des fins de servitude domestique, d'exploitation sexuelle et de mendicité infantile est particulièrement préoccupante au Nigéria.

Par conséquent, la Suisse appelle le gouvernement nigérian à renforcer le fonctionnement de son système éducatif ainsi que la sécurisation des écoles, notamment dans les zones de conflit, à prendre les mesures nécessaires pour prévenir, lutter et sanctionner la traite des enfants et, enfin, à améliorer la protection et favoriser l'insertion sociale des enfants non scolarisés.

Membre travailleur, Togo – Le rapport de la commission d'experts et sa décision de signaler le cas du Nigéria par une double note de bas de page concernant cette convention importante et fondamentale montrent que, malgré les efforts initiés par le gouvernement nigérian, la situation du travail des enfants au Nigéria ne s'est pas améliorée. Le rapport a montré que la situation s'est aggravée, comme en attestent les faits et les chiffres irréfutables émanant de diverses organisations internationales réputées telles que l'UNESCO, le PNUD et l'OIT. Aujourd'hui, plus de 20 millions d'enfants ne sont pas scolarisés et sont soumis à différentes formes de travail des enfants, avec des risques pour leur développement mental, physique, moral, social et psychologique.

Cette intervention vise à attirer l'attention de cette commission et du gouvernement nigérian sur la nécessité et l'urgence de lutter contre le travail des enfants, en particulier le terrible commerce du travail et du trafic des enfants qui naissent dans la sous-région ouest-africaine. Ces pires formes de travail des enfants au Nigéria favorisent davantage le travail forcé et la traite des enfants dans la sous-région. Selon le Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), une ONG nigériane, il est estimé qu'environ 12 millions d'enfants nigériens sont contraints au travail, et pourtant on pourrait estimer approximativement qu'environ 80 pour cent de ces enfants nigériens soumis au travail forcé sont victimes de la traite.

De manière grotesque, des gangs et des syndicats opèrent des opérations de traite des êtres humains en Afrique de l'Ouest, le Nigéria étant une plaque tournante et un centre de commerce très actifs. Les femmes et les enfants sont victimes de la traite et commercialisés comme des marchandises. Nous savons que la traite des personnes est une industrie mondiale qui génère 150 milliards de dollars de profits. Les frontières et les routes maritimes de la sous-région ouest-africaine ont été utilisées pour transporter des enfants, principalement des filles et des femmes, à l'intérieur des pays et vers l'Europe, où ils sont utilisés comme esclaves sexuels, et d'autres finissent comme domestiques et dans des fermes. Par conséquent, pour freiner efficacement les personnes qui commettent ces activités criminelles aussi lucratives, de formidables contremesures doivent être conçues pour les écraser. Cela signifie que les processus d'enquête, de poursuites et de sanctions doivent être solides et imaginatifs. En tant que parents, il nous incombe collectivement et rapidement d'agir.

Par conséquent, nous voulons exhorter la commission et cette Organisation à aider le gouvernement nigérian à s'associer à des organisations similaires pour intensifier les actions préventives et correctives contre la traite des enfants. Le gouvernement doit être aidé pour améliorer ses capacités, et ses capacités à suivre, arrêter, poursuivre et sanctionner les auteurs tout en réussissant à réhabiliter et à réintégrer les victimes des traites dans la société.

Membre travailleur, Sénégal – Je prends la parole au nom des organisations syndicales d'Afrique de l'Ouest pour saluer le travail de la commission d'experts sur le cas du Nigéria concernant la convention n° 182. Nous avons noté avec intérêt les informations fournies par le gouvernement nigérian, tout en déplorant l'absence de statistiques fiables sur le sujet en question. Le gouvernement nigérian a en effet annoncé avoir pris des mesures pour lutter contre le fléau des pires formes de travail des enfants, et nous le félicitons pour ses interventions.

Cependant, force est de constater que la situation des enfants ne fait que se détériorer: plus de 10 millions d'enfants ne sont pas scolarisés, et bon nombre de ces enfants non scolarisés sont engagés dans des activités de mendicité dans les rues dans le pays, mais avec une prédominance dans la partie nord du pays. Certains de ces enfants ont été contraints à la mendicité par leurs matrones et patrons qui ont bénéficié du produit de la mendicité de rue des enfants. Il existe également des cas où de nombreux enfants, en particulier des filles, ont été mariés tôt, et d'autres ont été victimes d'exploitation sexuelle.

En tant que Sénégalais, je connais les défis liés à la lutte contre la mendicité des enfants. Notre expérience avec les enfants talibés a montré que des efforts constants et inlassables de surveillance, de contrôle et de réalignement doivent être conçus pour s'assurer que les efforts produisent les résultats souhaités et que les anciens gains ne sont pas annulés.

D'après notre expérience, nous exhortons le gouvernement nigérian à concevoir un plan de suivi et d'évaluation efficace pour suivre et évaluer les interventions qu'il a mises en place. L'absence d'un système efficace de suivi et d'évaluation peut signifier que les interventions ne sont que symboliques et égoïstes.

Il est également essentiel que le gouvernement nigérian examine la législation existante pour s'assurer que des révisions sont faites pour prévoir des sanctions plus sévères contre les auteurs du travail des enfants. De même, le gouvernement nigérian doit intensifier les campagnes d'information et de sensibilisation des parents et de la communauté sur les risques élevés auxquels sont exposés les enfants des rues et continuer à travailler avec eux pour les endiguer.

Nous considérons comme éprouvé et efficace l'impératif d'une politique d'éducation et d'apprentissage de qualité, accessible à tous, inclusive, sans aucune discrimination, y compris les enfants almajiris. Cette politique doit tenir compte de la dimension de genre et des besoins éducatifs de la communauté, de manière à garantir que les fillettes reçoivent les soins et l'attention particuliers dont elles ont besoin. Cette politique d'éducation et d'apprentissage doit intégrer la santé et l'alimentation à l'école et dans les ateliers. Le gouvernement doit démontrer un engagement véritable et soutenu à retirer les enfants des rues et à les renvoyer dans les écoles et sur les terrains de jeu. Une véritable démonstration de cet engagement consistera à développer et appliquer des moyens pratiques et efficaces d'utiliser les dispositions de protection sociale pour lutter contre la pauvreté et les inégalités sociales.

Interpretation from Russian: **Government Member, Belarus** – We are grateful to the delegation of Nigeria for having provided a thorough report which gives detailed comments about the issues facing the Nigerian Government in eradicating the worst forms of child labour.

From the Report it is clear that this practice, including using children as soldiers, is something that you see exclusively in the areas under the control of Boko Haram. The Government is doing what it can to reintegrate these children into society once they are released. We feel that to eradicate the problem of child labour and to bring those responsible for it before the courts, the authorities first need to eradicate the root cause for the continuation of this practice here, that means stopping the activity of the terrorist organization which I mentioned. We urge the international community to give Nigeria every assistance in doing that.

Interpretation from Arabic: **Government member, Tunisia** – Tunisia thanks the Nigerian delegation for the report which indicates that Nigeria has respected its obligations and we also welcome the measures that have been undertaken by the Government to ensure it brings its legislation into conformity with the Convention and measures to eliminate them. We also welcome the efforts employed to improve access to education through a national policy of education and initiative for safe schools and an education campaign. We encourage the Government to continue to work with this Committee through the provision of information required on the cases of trafficked children.

Membre gouvernemental, Algérie – La délégation algérienne se félicite des efforts accomplis par la République fédérale du Nigéria pour l'application de la convention et l'encourage à poursuivre les réformes qui sont en cours dans ce sens. Elle prend note des différentes mesures prises dans la révision de son cadre législatif et réglementaire pour se conformer à la convention.

Ces mesures sont, selon le point de vue de ma délégation, des pas positifs dans la bonne direction malgré la complexité de la situation sur le terrain et la présence de groupes armés notamment dans le nord-est du pays. C'est dans ce cadre que s'inscrit la mise en place d'une stratégie de prévention et de lutte contre les pires formes de travail des enfants, notamment pour mettre fin et empêcher le recrutement et l'utilisation d'enfants dans les conflits armés.

Sur un autre plan, l'abolition du travail forcé, l'augmentation du taux de scolarisation et la réduction du taux d'abandon scolaire sont autant de mesures qui aideront, sans nul doute, à éradiquer les pires formes de travail des enfants au Nigéria.

C'est la raison pour laquelle la délégation algérienne appelle la commission à tenir compte des efforts considérables déployés par le Nigéria en faveur de la prévention et la lutte contre le terrorisme et, dans le même temps, de sa détermination et de son attachement à renforcer le dialogue avec les partenaires sociaux et les autres parties prenantes dans le cadre de sa réforme législative.

À cet effet, ma délégation salue la volonté de la République fédérale du Nigéria de continuer à travailler avec les partenaires sociaux et même avec le Bureau international du Travail pour donner effet aux principes inscrits dans la convention.

Pour toutes ces raisons, ma délégation encourage enfin le Bureau international du Travail à continuer à fournir une assistance technique pour compléter les efforts du gouvernement du Nigéria à l'effet de renforcer les programmes scolaires et éliminer les pires formes de travail des enfants, en particulier dans le secteur agricole et le travail domestique, mais aussi dans l'exploitation artisanale, et renforcer les capacités du système d'inspection du travail dans ce pays pour assurer sa pleine application de la convention.

Government member, Malawi – Malawi has taken note of the information provided by Nigeria on the efforts being made as regards to the implementation of the provisions of Convention No. 182 which Nigeria ratified on 2 October 2002.

We acknowledge and we commend the efforts of the Government of Nigeria in embarking on through the Minister of Defence, including carrying out regular sensitization workshops and ensuring the registration of members of vigilante groups are also closely monitored by the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. Also, child victims who have been released and/or rescued from the enclaves of Boko Haram is another welcome development which the Nigerian Government must continue implementing.

Malawi urges the Government of Nigeria to ensure that the Child Rights Bill has been signed into law by all states in the Federation for effective implementation and protection of the children. Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, No. 4, 2015, and continue programmes on access to education for all children.

Government member, Ghana – The Convention was ratified by the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as far back as 2 October 2002. It is important for this Committee to acknowledge the efforts the Government has put in place, to ensure that its legal system and other policies address the major requirements in the Convention. It is refreshing to note that the Government has gone further to initiate reforms towards the elimination of the worst forms of child labour within its borders, including deploying military assistance to identified affected States within the Federal Republic. The Government has intensified sensitization and awareness creation for the registration of members of vigilante groups. It has also increased its effort at rehabilitating victims of terrorism, ensured enforcement of laws, prohibiting forced and compulsory recruitment of children and trafficking persons. We support the honest admission by the Government on their concerns raised by the Committee of Experts and the commitments addressed in the minutes. The Government of Ghana supports any attempt to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in Nigeria, the West African sub-region in Africa as a whole. We urge the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to continue to seek technical assistance from the ILO and cooperation from social partners in its quest to reform its laws in line with the requirements of the Convention. It is the conviction of the Government

of Ghana that the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria will be able to sustain the fight to eliminate significantly the worst forms of child labour within the identified States in the Republic at large.

Government member, Namibia – We want to thank the Government of Nigeria for their comments. I have taken note of the Government's reaction to the comments by the Worker members. We want to urge the Government to take the comments in good faith, including comments relating to challenges faced regarding labour inspections and to work together with the tripartite constituents to address all these challenges. We thank other speakers for their interventions.

The Government must indeed double its efforts to tackle the phenomenon of the worst forms of child labour in Nigeria. The Government must continue in its effort to provide a safe, peaceful and secure environment for children to go to school. Other measures such as school feeding programmes and health checks in schools, must be provided to attract children to stay in school and reduce the burden on parents. Needed support must also go to the teachers. The Government must bring an end to the insurgence and conflict.

We want to urge the Government to seek and enhance technical assistance of the ILO to address the specific observations of the Committee of Experts, but also through international cooperation the assistance of other Member States who can assist with material and expert support, including, addressing cross-border and internal trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation.

Interpretation from Arabic: **Government member, Egypt** – We have taken note of the measures and efforts undertaken by the Government of Nigeria to achieve compatibility between national legislations and the provisions of the Convention with regards to the worst forms of child labour. The Government of Nigeria has set up a strong political and institutional and legal frameworks to protect children and to prevent them from being used or aggressed so that they can develop fully and the Government also adopted a law to protect children at the work place and identify that the minimum age for children to work and has imposed sanctions on those who do not respect the law and has also ensured that children have access to education and that they not be involved in dangerous work and has been mindful to ensure non-discrimination between boys and girls at the level of education. It also adopted a national strategic strategy which will be part of the five-year plan in Nigeria, and it also carried out a survey with regards with child labour and combatting child labour within the Axel Group Project. It also has established a monitoring network to ensure compliance at the workplace. The Government also has been mindful to protect children and ensure that they do not be involved in conflicts and war and has rehabilitated them and integrated them in the communities once again and has put in place monitoring mechanisms. We finally value the efforts undertaken by the Government of Nigeria to ensure the compatibility between the legislative laws and the Convention and we hope that the Committee will take into consideration the efforts undertaken by the Government of Nigeria.

Observer, Education International (EI) – On behalf of teachers' unions, Education International expresses deep concern regarding the issue of child labour in Nigeria. Child labour whether in its worst forms or not, deprives children of their basic right to education.

Education is a fundamental right that should be protected and promoted for every child. It is positive that the representative of the Nigeria Government, has mentioned initiatives related to education. Indeed, it is well documented that investing in free, quality public education contributes to eradicating child labour. However, education does not happen in a

vacuum. Education does not grow on trees. It requires well trained and well supported teachers.

The Worker member of the Nigeria Labour Congress already deplored the reduction in the share of funding of education. He also referenced the dismissals of teachers and irregular payment of teacher wages. We therefore strongly encourage the Nigerian Government to increase the funding to education and to support teachers to welcome working children and to keep children in school, particularly girls.

The Durban Call to Action (2022), to end child labour which has been mentioned earlier, is very specific in its recommendations entitled “Realizing children’s right to education”. It requests expanding education infrastructure for schools and safe commuting solutions, particularly in rural and remote areas. Paragraph 30 of the Durban Call to Action, requests improving teaching and learning outcomes, including by recruiting qualified teachers in sufficient numbers to close the teacher gap, by providing them with good conditions of work and by supporting teachers’ unions.

Education International firmly believes that addressing child labour requires collaborative efforts and a comprehensive approach. Therefore, the Government, trade unions, employers, civil society organizations and other education stakeholders must work together to eradicate child labour and provide a safe and nurturing environment for children to learn and grow.

Government representative – Let me first appreciate the countries for your input, for your statements, for your comments. I would like to say thank you especially to those who have acknowledged the efforts of the Government of Nigeria. I thank you for your encouraging words.

Let me seize the opportunity also to address the workers’ representative from Nigeria who made certain statements. He acknowledged that insecurity is a challenge, which everybody knows, and then he made a statement about the state of labour inspection, inspection in Nigeria being non-existent. That is news to me. Considering the fact that labour inspection is directly under my department, the Inspectorate Department, and on a monthly basis we get robust reports from the states. To further enhance this fight against child labour, we even developed a child-labour specific template to be able to help us identify – because one of the challenges is that you see a child, who looks like a child, but how do you prove this is a child? Sometimes they are not children. So we are trying to look at innovative ways of identifying children. So labour inspection is not non-existent. As a matter of fact it has become more robust because we have trained and re-trained our labour officers and more labour officers have been recruited in recent times. The worker representative also made a statement that the worst forms of child labour are normalized and I really do not know what that means. So why are we here if we have normalized the worst forms of child labour, why are we fighting child labour, why are we expending resources in the fight against child labour? It is curious because we work in collaboration with our social partners, the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress, as well as the Nigeria Employers’ Consultative Association (NECA) that are members of our steering committee at the national level – the National Steering Committee on Child Labour – as well as other states, and they have been very cooperative in the fight against child labour. So for a workers’ representative to make a statement that we have normalized child labour – there is no such thing.

The agricultural sector has been identified as the sector with the greatest number of child labourers in Nigeria and there are various projects taking place there now, in specific states in the global supply chain, for instance in Ondo state. All over Nigeria we have even trained agricultural extension officers to be child labour desk officers because obviously labour officers

cannot be everywhere. Nigeria is a vast country, with a large population. We have trained these agricultural extension officers to be able to identify child labour victims in their midst and report them to the Federal Ministry of Labour. The steering committee is made up of so many MDs as ministries, departments and agencies, so that we have that collaboration, that synergy, to tackle this issue. So when it comes to education, the Ministry of Education is on the steering committee as well. In relation to the concerns about education of the girl child, even the boy child in some communities, it is the boy child, and you have to take into consideration that some of these things are socio-cultural, ethno-religious issues. The Government has provided schools. Well because of your belief system, you think for some of them that school is not necessary for the girl child. For some of them, it is the boy child. The boy child is expected to go out and work and make money. So that is why we have put in place measures such as the National Orientation Agency which is the arm of Government that sensitizes the citizenry on issues. So we are trying to change their mindsets, for them to realize the benefits of education.

There is recession and poverty in Nigeria which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and it is something that the Government is working on to bring the country out of recession. As for one or two countries who spoke about the level of child labour in Nigeria but it is also curious to me because Togo in particular, while we are talking inter-border trafficking of children, Togo is a great supply country for Nigeria. You have a lot of Togolese children in Nigeria who came into Nigeria. So this is an issue for domestic work, this is an issue that concerns all the countries. From the statistics, whereas child labour is going down in other parts of the world, it is coming up in Africa. So it is not for other countries to castigate against that are supposedly dealing with this problem. We should all work together, and there is the Regional Action Plan in West Africa where we are all collaborating to fight this scourge. Even the African Union (AU) has a plan for us to eliminate child labour by the year 2030. This is a widespread problem that is not just a problem for Nigeria and – I thank the people who acknowledge Nigeria's efforts. We have so many other efforts that we have done that I didn't really have time to talk about but let me mention the employers' association Which has been very key in our fight against child labour. They have supported us in many ways and specifically, they have established a code of conduct for employers to sensitize employers on the ills of child labour and to encourage them not to employ child labourers.

We work with faith-based organizations, we work with community organizations to talk to the people. One of the things we are doing is sensitizing the communities, sensitizing the citizenry on the ills of child labour. We have heard several people talk about children being recruited by Boko Haram. The insurgency is something that nobody wished for, it has caused a lot of problems for the country, it is something that the Nigerian Government continues to fight on a daily basis. The insurgents did a lot of things, they even occupied some territory in Nigeria, but they have since been dislodged and the incidents and episodes of children being strapped with explosive devices – I do not think that it happens anymore. I have personally not heard of it taking place in the last two years. The Nigerian Government is putting all its efforts towards fighting this scourge. We would request and require assistance, obviously we cannot do it by ourselves, we request a lot of assistance, technical support in whichever, in any other way that support can be given, we require it, but Nigeria is doing a lot, a whole lot to end child labour.

On the issue of education, the schools are there. Definitely the schools could be better, definitely some schools need to be better positioned so that the children will have easy access to the schools, but the schools are there, and we are encouraging through our actions, our activities. Let me acknowledge the assistance through the Excel Africa project – accelerating action in the elimination of child labour in supply chains in global supply chains. They have

even helped in reorganizing some schools so that children from those communities – and their enrolment figures have shot up astronomically – and as I said earlier, the main issue is to reorganize and reorientate a lot of people on the benefits of education – for them to see that delayed gratification where you send your child to school. They look at it like “this child can be bringing in income” but when you let them know that the delayed gratification, when you send your child to school, later on that child has a better standard of living, that child is better able to provide for the family.

Well let me go back to the phenomenon of *almajiri* children. As I mentioned earlier, it is a socio-cultural, ethno-religious phenomenon that cannot be eradicated in one day. It is not something that can be done easily. It is something that requires advocacy, it requires sensitization, it requires just talking to these people and that is why we work – we work with all the religious organizations, the top-most religious organizations in Nigeria. For the Christians we have the Christian Association of Nigeria, for the Muslims, we have the National Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs. We interact with all these people; we call them the gatekeepers. We interact with traditional rulers. So in some communities this scourge has been eradicated just because the traditional rulers were brought onboard. There is community in Ondo state. There is a regent there right now, she is female, she took this fight to the community and now their children go to school. All I can say is that Nigeria is doing its best – we could do better, there is no doubt about it, there is always room for improvement in any activity – we have a new Government onboard. I forgot to mention one thing. Last year we brought in the first ladies, we have 36 states in Nigeria, and we reached out to the first ladies, that is wives of the governors because we see them as the mothers of the nation, as somebody says if you educate a woman, you have educated a whole nation. So when you bring in women, into a project, you know that they are going to take it and run with it. So we have reached out to them, even the first lady of Nigeria was represented – that was for the World Day Against Child Labour – the first lady of Nigeria was represented, and they have all promised to take up this fight.

In closing, I think we have done a lot. We have more work to do, and we are asking for the collaboration of our fellow African nations, nations of the world, the ILO, and other partners, to help us in this fight.

Employer members – The Employer members would like to thank the various speakers who took the floor and expressed their views on this matter, including the Government representative of Nigeria.

We can only trust that the Government representative who will take on all, and I mean all, of the comments made during the debate, which were all intended to constructively assist the Government to address the real scourge of child labour, especially its worst forms in Nigeria. While we acknowledge that the Government is indeed taking some measures to address the grave concerns on the situation of children in that country, we reiterate that in line with the Committee of Experts observations, more needs to be done.

We take note of the information shared by the Government representative on the efforts of the Government to deal with child labour. However, we note ongoing reports, including from the UN on continued grave violations of children’s rights. Accordingly, the Employers insist on the importance of the Convention as a fundamental Convention whose universal ratification reflects a universal consensus and a strong tripartite commitment to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

While acknowledging the complexity of this situation prevailing on the ground and the presence of armed groups and conflict in Nigeria, we share the concerns expressed by the Committee of Experts regarding the persistence of children being recruited and used by armed

groups which also results in other serious violations of children's rights, such as abductions, murders and sexual violence.

In light of the Committee of Experts' observations and today's debate, the Employer members would like to recommend that the Government of Nigeria should do the following:

- Continue to take measures using all available means to ensure the full and immediate demobilization of all children and put a stop in practice to their forced recruitment into armed groups. Ensure the thorough investigation, prosecution and penalization of all perpetrators of forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict as well as ensure the rehabilitation and social integration of child victims of forced recruitment.
- Secondly, strengthen its efforts to combat child trafficking by ensuring that the perpetrators of these acts are identified and prosecuted, and that sufficiently effective and dissuasive sanctions are imposed.
- Thirdly, intensify its efforts to improve the functioning of the education system and to facilitate access for all children to free basic education, in particular for girls and children in the war affected areas of North-Eastern Nigeria.
- Fourthly, take effective and time-bound measures to protect all street children, including *almajiri*, from the worst forms of child labour and to provide for their rehabilitation and reintegration as well as provide information on measures taken and the number of children integrated.

Finally, the Employer members call on the Government to continue availing itself of ILO technical assistance to implement the above-mentioned recommendations and future reporting obligations. We also count on the Government's continued efforts to implement concrete measures to ensure the demobilization of all children who have been forcibly recruited or are used by armed groups and to ensure the protection for all boys and girls who remain vulnerable to such risk and to the risk of being trafficked.

Worker members – We want to thank the Government of Nigeria for their comments. I have taken note of the Government's reaction to the comments by the Worker members. We want to urge the Government to take the comments in good faith, including comments relating to challenges faced regarding labour inspections and to work together with the tripartite constituents to address all these challenges. We thank other speakers for their interventions.

The Government must indeed double its efforts to tackle the phenomenon of the worst forms of child labour in Nigeria. The Government must continue in its effort to provide a safe, peaceful and secure environment for children to go to school. Other measures such as school feeding programmes and health checks in schools, must be provided to attract children to stay in school and reduce the burden on parents. Needed support must also go to the teachers. The Government must bring an end to the insurgence and conflict.

We want to urge the Government to seek and enhance technical assistance of the ILO to address the specific observations of the Experts, but also through international cooperation the assistance of other Member States who can assist with material and expert support, including, addressing cross-border and internal trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation.

Conclusions of the Committee

The Committee took note of the oral and written information provided by the Government and the discussion that followed.

While acknowledging the complexity of the situation prevailing on the ground and the presence of armed groups in the country, the Committee deeply deplored the current situation where children are being forcibly recruited by armed groups for use in armed conflict, which also results in other serious violations of children's rights, such as abductions, murder and sexual violence.

The Committee noted with deep concern the situation of children, in particular girls, children in war-affected areas and street/*Almajiri* children, who continue to be deprived of basic education.

The Committee also expressed concern at the persistence of child trafficking, particularly of girls for the purpose of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation and boys for the purpose of child begging.

Taking into account the discussion of the case, the Committee urges the Government of Nigeria to take effective and time-bound measures to:

- ensure the full and immediate demobilization of all children and to put a stop, in law and practice, to the forced recruitment or use of children into armed groups;
- ensure that thorough investigations and prosecutions of all persons who forcibly recruit children for use in armed conflict are carried out and sufficiently effective and dissuasive penalties are imposed in law and practice;
- improve the functioning of the education system to facilitate access to free quality basic education for all children, particularly girls and street children, and security and safety of children in war-affected areas, and to take measures to increase the school enrolment and attendance rates at the primary and secondary levels and to decrease the school drop-out rates, and provide information to the Committee of Experts on the measures taken in this regard, and on the results achieved.
- provide for the rehabilitation and social integration of street children and children who are forced to join armed groups, and provide information to the Committee of Experts on the measures taken in this regard, including by the *Almajiri* Special Education Project, and on the results achieved.
- combat child trafficking by ensuring that the perpetrators of these acts are identified and prosecuted, and that sufficiently effective and dissuasive sanctions are imposed in law and practice, and provide information to the Committee of Experts on the measures taken in this regard, including by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, and on the results achieved.

The Committee requests the Government to continue to avail itself of ongoing ILO technical assistance to give full implementation to the above-mentioned measures and progress towards the full eradication of the worst forms of child labour in accordance with the Convention.

The Committee also requests the Government to submit a report to the Committee of Experts by 1 September 2023 with the relevant information, in consultation with the social partners.

Government representative – We appreciate the discussions on this important subject towards improving the overall situation of children globally and specifically in Nigeria. We acknowledge that this Convention can be considered the most important among all the core Conventions as it deals with children who are the future of society. It can also be considered a

reflection of a nation's soul as the state of its humanity is portrayed by how well the children are protected and given a good life for a hopeful future. In the light of the content of this conclusion, we recommit to strengthening the ongoing efforts and interventions in this area through the instrumentality of the relevant organs of the government together with robust consultations with our social partners and the ILO. This implies a continued implementation of interventions in-line with the provisions of Convention No. 182 and mainstreaming with a very high place and consideration the recommendations made by this Committee towards eliminating child labour in its worst forms.

However, Chairperson, regarding the timeframe given for reporting on the progress made, the Committee is invited to kindly note that Nigeria is in transition at the moment and therefore, would appreciate reasonable time for the new administration to settle down and coordinate with constituents to address the observed lapses and implement the recommendations. We are committed and prepared to cooperate with the Office and relevant stakeholders to achieve this.